



NEWS...

From

Legislator Tom Cilmi

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County Executive Levy, Legislator Cilmi, Receive Oil Spill Emergency Response Plan

Multi-Departmental Effort Outlines Potential Impact from BP Disaster in Gulf



Hauppauge, NY—Suffolk County Executive Steve Levy and County Legislator Tom Cilmi met with county officials on Thursday for a briefing on Suffolk's Oil Spill Emergency Response Plan.

While Levy and Cilmi noted the potential for impact in local waterways is very minimal, they said it is still important to plan for the worst. The officials said the Gulf spill also presented an opportunity for Suffolk to update its plan for reacting to other environmental catastrophes that might threaten the waterways, such as leakage from an oil tanker in the Atlantic.

“The belief is that thankfully most, if not all, of the oil is not projected to impact our region – and if it did, it would not be during our beach and boating season,” said Levy. “But one lesson this environmental disaster has taught us is that things don’t always go as projected. For example, when the leak first occurred, nobody would have thought it would take 85 days to stop.

“Even though it is not expected that the Gulf oil will dramatically impact us here, we have nevertheless prepared for the worst,” he added.

“Failure to plan is planning to fail,” noted Legislator Cilmi. “We believe it is prudent for us to examine how we would detect, monitor and react to the unlikely event that oil reaches our shores, and I thank the County Executive and the many department heads who sat together to develop this plan.”

The report notes that while the United States Coast Guard and the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation are the primary responders to an oil spill at sea, Suffolk County would play an important coordination role within the federal Unified Command Structure.

The report also said that local, deepwater fishing fleets are likely to be the first to detect the presence of oil beneath the surface offshore, and that any oil product that reached Suffolk’s shores would most likely be in the form of sub-surface tar balls, as opposed to surface oil slicks.

Recommendations of the report include:

- Continued local coordination, through the Suffolk County Department of Fire, Rescue and Emergency Services, with USCG and NYSDEC;
- Inventory and potential staging of equipment needed for beach and waterway cleanup of oil, such as beach rakes, disposable HAZMAT suits, masks, gloves and waste disposal drums;
- Identification of disposal sites for collected oil product;
- Coordination with Cornell Cooperative Extension and the fishing industry for early detection of oil below the ocean surface;
- Coordination of potential food-related concerns (i.e., fish and shellfish) with the U.S. Food and Drug Administration and the Suffolk County Department of Health Services;
- Outreach to marine life rescue agencies, such as Riverhead Aquarium;
- Utilization, if necessary, of the FRES hotline number for public informational messages;
- Health Department issuance, if necessary, of public health advisories;

Levy said all departments will also track staff hours associated with the county’s response in order to afford the opportunity to address possible reimbursement through BP.

Agencies involved in the response plan, which was coordinated by Director of Planning Tom Isles, were: Planning; Environment and Energy; Fire, Rescue and Emergency Services; Health Services; Public Works; Parks; Police; and Economic Development.